

# Botanical Garden of Brussels

The **Botanical Garden of Brussels** (French: *Jardin botanique de Bruxelles*, Dutch: *Kruidtuin van Brussel*) stands on Rue Royale/Koningsstraat in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, near Brussels' Northern Quarter financial district. The main building is a cultural complex and music venue known as Le Botanique. It can be accessed from the Botanique/Kruidtuin metro station on lines 2 and 6 of the Brussels metro.

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## History

### Origins

A first plant garden (*Jardin des plantes*) existed since the French rule of Belgium in 1795, at a different location, along Brussels' first wall, in the Hôtel de Nassau—a building belonging to the former Palace of Coudenberg—and in its garden. The collection of native and exotic species quickly attracted interest, but due to the growth of the city and the threat of destruction of the city walls, this garden had to be relocated to its current area near the Northern Quarter.

In 1815, Belgium became part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1826, five notable botany enthusiasts acquired a suitable wooded lot of 6 hectares (15 acres), in what was then a suburban town north of the city, to create an ensemble housing the already existing collections of plants. The Royal Horticultural Society of the Netherlands was born. Although it was rooted on a private enterprise, it was also intended to be a national institution dedicated to science and botanical studies.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Botanical Garden of Brussels

*Jardin botanique de Bruxelles* (French)

*Kruidtuin van Brussel* (Dutch)



Botanical Garden of Brussels main building, *Le Botanique*

Type	Public park
Location	Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, Brussels-Capital Region, Belgium
Created	1826
Public transit access	Botanique/Kruidtuin

The botanical building was partly designed by architect Tilman-François Suys and the works were directed by decorative artist Pierre-François Gineste.<sup>[2]</sup> The building and gardens were officially inaugurated with fireworks, celebrations and a banquet for the first exhibition of horticultural products organised by the Royal Horticultural Society of the Netherlands from 1 to 3 September 1829.

## Post-independence (1830–1938)

At the country's independence in 1830, the institution became the Royal Horticultural Society of Belgium. The Botanical Garden was in dire need of funds, thus a plant trade was established at the *Orangerie* in 1835, with various vegetables being cultivated in the basement. This would accidentally lead to the birth of the Belgian Endive.<sup>[3]</sup>

After decades of financial uncertainty, the Belgian state bought the garden in 1870 and commissioned various fountains, electrical lighting, and the addition of numerous sculptures, in order to both beautify the park and stimulate public art and artists in the country. All through the 19th century, the garden was a popular recreational area for the bourgeoisie. Victor Hugo, during his first stay in Brussels in 1852, wrote:

*Brussels has two unique wonders in the world: the Grand Place and the panorama of the Botanical Garden.*<sup>[1]</sup>



The Botanical Garden in the 19th century

During the 1930s, the works of the North-South junction did not spare the Botanical Garden. It was decided to entirely move the botany institution to a larger site. In 1938, most of the botanical resources were relocated to the new National Botanic Garden of Belgium in Meise, on the outskirts of today's Brussels-Capital Region. The old garden was reduced in size and made into a park after part of its western premises were used to facilitate a north-south road-viaduct.

## Contemporary (1938–present)

The whole site has been designated since 15 April 1964.<sup>[2]</sup> Since its reallocation in 1984, the original botanical building now stands as a cultural centre for the French Community of Belgium called Le Botanique,<sup>[1]</sup> while its historical statues, and its remarkable collection of species of large trees, remains intact.

## Building

The main orangery building (*Le Botanique*) is one-story high and its south-facing neoclassical facade is preceded by two terraces. The building consists of a central rotunda with a dome, and is flanked by two wings lined with windows, each ending in a slightly offset pavilion with Ionic columns.

Though it has been transformed to meet its new function as a cultural centre (including concert halls and showrooms), the interior of the building retains most of its original appearance. The former herbarium room in the west wing was transformed into a cafeteria, and the two pavilions into the entrance hall and a multipurpose room.



The rotunda, with sculptures in the foreground

# Sculptures

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Fifty-two sculptures were executed between 1894 and 1898, a project overseen by two well-known sculptors; Constantin Meunier and Charles van der Stappen. The sculptures portray allegorical figures of plants, animals, and seasons. Some of the 43 sculptors involved include:

- Arthur Craco
- Victor De Haen
- Isidore De Rudder
- Albert Desenfans
- Julien Dillens
- Paul Du Bois
- Jules Lagae
- Léon Mignon
- Victor Rousseau
- Charles Samuel
- French sculptor François Rude



*The Laurel (or Fame)*, sculptor  
Julien Dillens

## Botanical Garden sculptures



*Winter* by Pierre Jean Braecke      *The Laurel (or Fame)*, sculptor Julien Dillens      *Two nymphs surrounding a source* by Albert Hambresin (1890), original by François Rude (1826)      *Le Palmier* by Victor De Haen



*Autumn* by  
Constantin  
Meunier.

## See also

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- [List of parks and gardens in Brussels](#)
- [Botanic Garden Meise](#)

## References

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- Frommer's Brussels and Bruges Day by Day By Mary Anne Evans, pg. 95
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